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CHRISTOLOGY AND PSALM 2:7  
IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

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## Introduction

From the promise of redemption in the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 to the promise of the Second Advent in Revelation 22, the Scriptures are thoroughly Christocentric. Christ is foreshadowed in the ceremony and prophecy of the Old Testament. Furthermore, He is fully known in the Gospels and subsequently in the following books in the New Testament. He is the central focus of God's revelation. Indeed, He is the very revelation of God. John's statement near the end of his account of the life of Christ sums up the purpose for the whole of Scripture when he says that "these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this work is to examine one portion of the Scriptures. The specific focus is the book of Hebrews, a theological treatise with pastoral admonition<sup>2</sup>, written to encourage a Jewish audience to see Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and to warn them of the dangers of unbelief in the Messiah.<sup>3</sup> To an audience tempted to revert to a false security in the Old Testament sacrificial system, the author of Hebrews emphasizes the superiority of Christ. The book has been recognized as being "particularly rich in Christology; in fact, it may justly be described as in the main a Christological treatise."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*New King James Version* (All subsequent references will be quoted from the New King James Version), John 20:31 - While John's statement refers solely to the purpose for his book, the testimony of Scripture is clear that this statement is true of the whole of Scripture as well.

<sup>2</sup>Because it begins like a sermon and ends like an epistle, the genre of Hebrews has been an issue of some debate. Based on 13:22 most commentators understand Hebrews to be a sermon. F.F. Bruce explains that a "word of exhortation" is a kind of sermon as is made plain in Acts 13:15, where the rulers of the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch invite Paul and Barnabas to speak a "word of exhortation for the people" (25). Ellingworth, on the other hand, argues that it is an *epistle* "in which its author displays skill in both written and (indirectly) oral communication" (62).

<sup>3</sup>See Guthrie, 31-38 for a thorough discussion of the different views concerning the specific audience.

<sup>4</sup>Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, "The Christology of Hebrews," *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 28 (Fall 1985): 19.

This work will focus more specifically on the use of Ps. 2 by the author of Hebrews. While the use of the Old Testament is prominent in the book of Hebrews<sup>5</sup>, the use of Psalms in particular is noteworthy. In his essay *On the Use of the Old Testament in the Epistle to the Hebrews* Westcott makes two points relevant to this issue. The first point is that "of the twenty-nine passages quoted twenty-three are taken from the Pentateuch and the Psalms; the fundamental Law, and the book of common devotion."<sup>6</sup> The author ostensibly focuses on these two portions of the Old Testament. Perhaps even more striking is the fact that "with two exceptions (2 Sam. vii. 14; Is. viii 17 f.), all the primary passages which are quoted to illustrate the true nature of the Person and Work of Christ are taken from the Psalms."<sup>7</sup> The author understands these psalms to be spoken by Christ Himself, or spoken by the Father to or about Jesus the Son.

This work will explore the profound implications of this truth. The implications for our understanding of the entire book of Psalms and the Old Testament as a whole will be examined. Conclusions will then be drawn that will bring to light specific applications for the individual and the church.

Scholars have noted the abundant use of the book of Psalms in the book of Hebrews. There is a reason for this. In the early church each congregation did not possess individual copies of portions of the Old Testament. The psalms were memorized and sung in services. The author is appealing to his audience's memory of the psalms. It was a point of contact between the author and the audience. The following chapters from Psalms are cited in the book with Christological significance: 2, 8, 22, 40, 45, 102, 110.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Macmillan, 1928), 475. He notes also that there are a total of 29 quotations and 53 allusions to the Old Testament in Hebrews.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Not all scholars would consider Psalm 8 to be a Christological psalm. This writer is fully aware of the criticism of viewing the psalm from a New Testament perspective.

There are two other psalms quoted with no Christological significance, namely, Pss. 95 and 118. The author quotes passages from these chapters for different reasons in different contexts, all revealing something particular to the author's purpose concerning the Person and Work of Christ. No other Old Testament book is used in Hebrews to affirm the truth concerning the Person and Work of Christ as is Psalms. The author reveals the Christological nature of the psalms he quotes and he therefore uses the book to explain the truths about Christ which his audience had not embraced. While there are a total of eleven quotations and two allusions to the book of Psalms in Hebrews, this work will focus on one which has particular Christological significance, namely, Ps. 2:7.

### **General Survey of the Thesis**

In the examination of the Christology of Hebrews, and the Christological significance of Ps. 2:7 in particular, this work will seek to take note of current scholarship on the topic. This literature review will include a survey of relevant journals, commentaries, and other modern works on the topic. The contribution in the area of the Christology of Psalms and Hebrews will be noted. Following the literature review, the theological review will deal with relevant theological issues concerning the Christology of Hebrews and how the book of Psalms is used Christologically in Hebrews. The Biblical analysis, then, will deal directly with Psalm 2:7 as it is used by the author of Hebrews. This exegesis will include the following: 1) the historical context of Ps. 2, 2) a discussion of the outline of the psalm, 3) the immediate context in the book of Hebrews where Ps. 2 is quoted, and finally, 4) the meaning of Psalm 2:7 in Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5. The exegesis will then be followed by a review of Church History. The focus of this portion of the work will be an investigation of the understanding of Christology and of the contribution of Psalms and Hebrews to this area of theology. The thoughts of theologians throughout the ages will be traced and brought to bear on the topic.

## **Proposition Statement**

This work will demonstrate two truths. First, while the book of Psalms, and more specifically the kingship psalms, namely Pss. 20, 21, 45, 47, 98 and 110, often address or speak of a Davidic king, the true nature of these Psalms is Christological. The book of Hebrews bears this out. One such example is the use of Ps. 2:7 in Heb. 1:5 and 5:5. This work will seek to illustrate this truth and deal with the broader implications of the Church's understanding of these Psalms by examining Ps. 2:7. The book of Hebrews is a wonderful New Testament key to understanding Christology and the true nature of these Psalms. Second, Ps. 2:7 plays a significant role in illustrating the Christological nature of the book of Hebrews. The theology section in particular will include a discussion of the Christology of Hebrews and the impact of Ps. 2:7.

## **Literature Review**

### **Christology of Hebrews in General**

Theologians have not been able to agree on the specific purpose of the book of Hebrews. In reviewing the literature on the topic, theories concerning the purpose can be divided into at least four categories: 1) theories stating that the overarching influence in the book comes from the Jewish thinker, Philo, 2) theories that the author uses Ps. 110 to organize and structure the book, 3) theories that there is no such structure intended by the author, but that the book is primarily meant to warn Jewish Christians of reverting back into Judaism, and 4) finally, there are those who see the book as a reaction to the influences surrounding the Qumran community. While the above theories are not mutually exclusive, they do represent the main ideas in the literature on this topic.

R. Tarnas explains the basic thought of Philo.

The philosophical integration of Hellenism with Judaism was initiated by Philo of Alexandria (b. c. 15-10 B.C.), who identified the Logos in Platonic terms as the Idea of Ideas, as the summation of all ideas, and as the source of the world's intelligibility; and in Judaic terms as God's providential ordering of the universe and as mediator between God and man.<sup>9</sup>

In short, Philo integrated the Platonic idea of Forms with Jewish thought. His view of God and the universe was directed by the influence of Plato.

The work of M. Parsons in *Evangelical Quarterly* represents a thorough discussion of the widespread scholarship favoring a Philonic influence on the writer of Hebrews. Quoting C. Spicq, M. Parsons argues that at the very least the author of Hebrews studied the work of Philo "and probably even knew him personally and was taught by him."<sup>10</sup> He goes on to discuss the more recent revival of this idea by L.K.K. Dey who makes the argument that Hebrews can only be understood "from the viewpoint of a single religious thought world – Hellenistic Judaism and more particularly, the writings of Philo."<sup>11</sup>

D. Guthrie comments regarding the influence of Philo on the author of Hebrews. He explains that Philo's purpose was to "trace the main concepts of his Greek environment back to Jewish sources."<sup>12</sup> He goes on to explain that Philo seemed to have little regard for historical context in his allegorization of texts. While there may be a significant number of words and phrases which appear in both Philo and Hebrews,<sup>13</sup> the

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<sup>9</sup>Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind* (New York: Harmony Books, 1991), 474475.

<sup>10</sup>Mikeal Parsons, "Son and High Priest: A Study in the Christology of Hebrews," *Evangelical Quarterly*, 60 (July 1988): 196.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 42.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

grand difference is that the writer of Hebrews takes seriously the historical context of the many Old Testament texts he cites.<sup>14</sup>

R. Williamson, on the other hand, in his work, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, argues for 600 pages on the topic and finally concludes the following. “The writer of Hebrews had never been a Philonist, had never read Philo’s works, had never come under the influence of Philo directly or indirectly.”<sup>15</sup>

While not quite as popular as the theory of Philonic influence, the idea that the book of Hebrews is primarily a treatise structured by Ps. 110 has some proponents. M. Saucy, in his article entitled “Exaltation Christology in Hebrews: What Kind of Reign?,” is one of them. “Our examination of the exaltation Christology as it is expressed through Ps 110:1 in Hebrews shows several repeated and consistent themes. First, Ps 110:1 plays a critical role in the structure of the epistle.”<sup>16</sup> While few would doubt the importance of the role of Ps. 110 in Hebrews, the idea here is that the author is specifically structuring the book by using Ps. 110 in a specific manner.

D. Johnson, in his class notes for his course on the book of Hebrews, discusses Ps. 110 as a unifying thread in Hebrews. He notes six portions of the book where Ps. 110 is either alluded to or directly quoted. They range from Heb. 1:13 to 12:2. D. Johnson lists the following passages as references to Ps. 110: Heb. 1:13 (Ps. 110:1), 5:6,7 (Ps. 110:4), 6:13-20, 7:1-8:1 (Gen. 14; Ps. 110:4), 10:11-12 and 12:2.<sup>17</sup> While there is little

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 579.

<sup>16</sup>Mark Saucy, “Exaltation Christology in Hebrews: What Kind of Reign?,” *Trinity Journal* 14 (Spring 1993): 51.

<sup>17</sup>Dennis Johnson *The Epistle to the Hebrews - Course Notes* (Grand Rapids: Outreach Incorporated, 1999, 30-31.

doubt that the author saw Ps. 110 as having particular import, the abundant citation of so many other Psalms in particular and portions of the Old Testament in general argue against dogmatism in this view.

The most common view concerning the purpose of Hebrews is that the book was being written to Jewish Christians, warning them of the dangers of apostasy. According to this understanding of Hebrews, Roman Christians were beginning to revert to Judaism as a means of salvation. Whatever the influence causing the actions of these believers, they were given the example of the Israelites in the wilderness and warned that they should not repeat the apostasy. The Christology of the book stresses Christ as the reality as opposed to the shadows of the reality in the Old Testament. F.F Bruce and D. Guthrie represent two contemporary proponents of this popular view.

While F. F. Bruce concedes that great thinkers of the twentieth century have concluded that Hebrews was actually addressed to Gentile Christians<sup>18</sup>, he supports the view that the recipients were Jewish believers. F. F. Bruce cites the abundant use of the Old Testament and the stress on the Old Covenant in the book to refute the view of J. Moffatt that the audience was mainly Gentile.<sup>19</sup>

According to F. F. Bruce, Ps. 2:7 is cited in the first chapter to support the truth that Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, is superior to the angels, the mediators of the Old Covenant. In his view this kingship psalm would go far in establishing the superiority of Christ.

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<sup>18</sup>F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 5.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 6.

D. Guthrie also supports the view that the high Christology of Hebrews is aimed at encouraging Jewish Christians to maintain faith in their Messiah, and avoid reverting to Judaism.<sup>20</sup> His understanding of the use of Ps. 2:7 would be in full accord with that of F. F. Bruce. These two modern theologians continue a traditional view held by many since the time of the Apostolic Fathers.

Finally, in reviewing the literature on the topic, the connection with Qumran is a common theme in the writings of many. Dr. R. Kidd, in his class notes for the course *Hebrews Through Revelation*, cites considerable evidence to support this view.<sup>21</sup> He explains that the Essenes, a separatist group living in the desert and seeking to live pure Judaism, believed in two messiahs. One of these messiahs would be of the line of Aaron and the other of the line of David. Significant in this Qumran community was the idea that both of these messiahs would be subordinate to Michael, the Archangel. The future world would be ruled by angels as well. The ultimate purpose of this group, according to Dr. Kidd, was to go to the desert to seek purification and then return to “seek eschatological victory.”<sup>22</sup> He also discusses the significant role of Melchizedek in the Qumran community. The theory is that the author of Hebrews is writing to combat these theological tendencies among this particular group or any group that had similar ideas.

J. D. G. Dunn discusses the potential of this view and states that “this view is wholly plausible since we know that the mysterious figure of Melchizedek attracted

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<sup>20</sup>Guthrie, 35.

<sup>21</sup>Reggie Kidd, *Hebrews through Revelation* Class Notes, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

rather diverse speculation in first-century Judaism, in particular both at Qumran and Philo.”<sup>23</sup>

D. J. Charles gives a convincing argument for this view. He explains that “apocalyptic angelology” was a “staple of the Qumran Essenes.”<sup>24</sup> He cites evidence of the role of Michael the Archangel in late Judaism. He then links these ideas to the argument of the author of Hebrews in the first and second chapters, explaining that the writer’s sudden deprecation of angels may be explained in Qumranian terms. While in the end he states that this theory cannot be proven conclusively, his copious citation of works from the Qumran community lends credibility to this view.

P. E. Hughes gives more insight in favor of this view. He explains that the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls has led to a greater “understanding of the seriousness of this issue.”<sup>25</sup> P. E. Hughes asserts that “the Qumranians had withdrawn to the desert, there to prepare and wait for the setting up of the eschatological messianic kingdom in Jerusalem.”<sup>26</sup> P. E. Hughes states that according to the Qumranians Michael and Melchizedek were one and the same. P. E. Hughes’ assessment of the influence of Qumran provides an insightful representation of this view.

This being so, it is all the more easy to see the need for the careful instruction concerning the significance of Melchizedek which our author is so anxious to communicate to the recipients of his letter (see especially chapter 7), who, it is fair to conclude, were being induced to permit Melchizedek, interpreted as an angelic super-being, to rival the supremacy of Christ.

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<sup>23</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry Into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 55.

<sup>24</sup>Daryl J. Charles, “The Angels, Sonship; and Birthright in the Letter to the Hebrews,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 33 (June 1990): 172.

<sup>25</sup>Hughes, 21.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

The chain of passages cited (Heb. 1:5-13) establishes the divine and therefore supreme lordship of the Son and also the creaturely subordination of the angels, who are but, 'ministering spirits sent forth to serve' (1:14). Significantly, because it is so appropriate a counter to the eschatological expectation of the Qumran community, the admonition is given that 'it was not to the angels that God subjected the world to come' (2:5). No angel is the supreme lord of all. Psalm 8:4-6 is quoted which speaks of man as being 'for a little while lower than the angels,' but which at the same time indicates that man's ultimate destiny is to be 'crowned with glory and honor' with 'everything in subjection under his feet' (Heb. 2:6-8); in other words, though temporarily lower than the angels man is intended by God to be exalted to a position of dignity higher than the angels.<sup>27</sup>

M. Parsons discusses fragments found at Qumran which are said to support this view of the book of Hebrews. He gives a very helpful overview of the history of this view. His comments are highly relevant to the purpose of this portion of the present work, and are therefore worthy of being quoted at length.

Yigael Yadin was the first scholar to draw far-reaching conclusions about the relationship between Hebrews and Qumran. After comparing the Hebrews' treatment of Jesus and the prophets, angels, Moses and Aaron, with that of Qumran, Yadin argued that the epistle was written to a group who held or who had held many of the Qumran sects' beliefs. Kosmala developed this conclusion and went so far as to claim that the author had written to an Essene community / congregation urging them to become Christians. Two scholars, F.F. Bruce and Joseph Coppens, working independently, brought the conclusion of Yadin and others under close scrutiny and restored 'the sober common sense of the scholarly community.' Both writers argued that the differences between the ideas found in the scrolls and those found in Hebrews were more significant than the similarities. Their plea was to put to rest the flurries of what Samuel Sandmel once called 'parallelomania' and to return to a more cautious and judicious attitude concerning the relationship between Qumran and the New Testament.

A new dimension was added to the discussion, however, with the publication of 13 small fragments found in Cave 11 at Qumran. 11Qmelch focused on the figure of Melchizedek as a kind of 'celestial being.' Yadin again saw a direct link between the Melchizedek of 11Qmelch and the Melchizedek figure in Hebrews and suggested that the author of Hebrews had selected the figure of Melchizedek because he was already known to the converted Essene congregation. Others have been more cautious in their judgment, claiming that while 11Qmelch may have no direct link with Hebrews, it does shed light on the

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 22.

thought patterns of first-century Judaism. Still others have recently claimed that the figure of Melchizedek may be understood without reference to Qumran.<sup>28</sup>

The Christological significance of this issue is clear. Theologians supporting this view claim that the writer's view of Christ is directed by his purposes regarding his particular audience. In other words, the author of Hebrews is seen as exhibiting such a high Christology in an effort to combat the Qumranian distortion of the truth. Instead of two messiahs, there is only one, and He is not subordinate to any other. He is the Creator of all things and He is God. The future world, therefore, will not be ruled by angels, but rather by the Son of God.

In his commentary on Hebrews, D. Guthrie discusses five supposed connections between the Qumran community and Hebrews: 1) the dominance of the priestly caste at Qumran, 2) their interest in exegesis, 3) the presence of the "Qumran Teacher of Righteousness," 4) kingly aspects of a Messiah, and finally, 5) certain purificatory rites which existed at Qumran which are said to be addressed in Hebrews.<sup>29</sup> He argues his points and finally concludes. "In view of all this there is justification for the view that the Qumran literature and cultic practices throw some light on the milieu to which the readers of this epistle belong, although it is questionable whether any direct contact can be made."<sup>30</sup>

Hebrews 13:24 sheds some light on the issue. The author ends the epistle with the words "Those from Italy greet you." Italians who are with the writer are sending a greeting back home to their fellow countrymen. How exactly would the Qumranian

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<sup>28</sup>Parsons, 197-198.

<sup>29</sup>Guthrie, 40-41.

theory fit into this understanding of the identity of the recipients? Were there Jews in Italy who were influenced by the Essenes? If so, how and to what degree? In a review of the relevant literature on the topic, therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude with Guthrie that while there seems to be the possibility of a strong connection, no such connection can be firmly established.

If indeed the writer of Hebrews was addressing a community which had been influenced by Qumranian ideology, his use of Ps. 2:7 is powerful. In this single citation from the Old Testament the author places Christ, the true Messiah, in a position above the angels, so highly regarded among the Essenes. Dunn states, however, that it is actually “uncertain whether it was accorded messianic significance at Qumran.”<sup>31</sup>

The most that may be asserted is that dogmatism on this issue is unwarranted. Dunn’s statement, however, proves very little. Just because there is an uncertainty as to the Qumranian understanding of Ps. 2:7, it does not follow that the author of Hebrews is not addressing the ideas propagated by this community. To the contrary, the parallels are too striking to ignore. The true Messiah is superior to the angels, not subordinate to them (see chap. 1-2). This Messiah is a Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron (see chap. 7). The Qumranians, having gone to the desert to seek purification, are warned of the rebellion of Israel *in the wilderness* (see 3:7-19). The Qumranian’s distorted views on angels, priesthood and the mysterious Melchizedek are all addressed in Hebrews. With all due respect to F. F. Bruce who denies any connection, the parallels

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>31</sup>Dunn, 35.

cannot be overlooked, and at the very least shed light on the atmosphere of heretical thinking combated by the author of Hebrews.

### Christology of Psalm 2:7 in Hebrews

Having surveyed the literature concerning the Christology of the book of Hebrews in general, we now focus on the literature concerning the use of Ps. 2:7 in the book. Questions to be addressed in this section are the following: What do theologians say about the original life setting of Ps. 2? Is there a general consensus concerning the date of the composition of Ps. 2? Knowledge of the date and life-setting of Ps. 2 will lead to a deeper understanding of how it applies to Christ. In light of these insights, what do theologians say about the meaning of the Psalm passage in Hebrews? Finally, what Christological significance does Ps. 2:7 have according to authorities on the subject?

J. Watts presents the three most common views among scholars concerning the life setting and date of Ps. 2. He explains that “the argument is a product of the larger debate over the nature of royal ideology in ancient Israel and especially Judah, and is determinative for theological interpretations of Ps. 2.”<sup>32</sup> What he means by this is simply that the larger argument concerns whether or not the Israelites themselves recognized the king as being divine as did other nations during this time.

J. Watts explains that A. Bentzen, I. Engnell, A. R. Johnson and G. Widengren are the leading proponents for the view that because of supposed parallels between Ps. 2 and other writings, it follows that the same view concerning the view of the king must have

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<sup>32</sup>James Watts “Psalm 2 in the Context of Biblical Theology,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, 12 (1990): 74.

existed among the Israelites. He refers to them as the “myth and ritual” or “pattern” schools and gives the following description of their theory.

On the basis of parallels between Ps 2 and royal texts of other Ancient Near Eastern peoples, they argued that the psalm provides *prima facie* evidence for the belief that the king in Jerusalem was in some sense divine. Like its neighbors, so the argument goes, ancient Israel and Judah must have celebrated the New year’s festival in which the king played a cultic role, re-enacting his enthronement with God and his victory over foreign enemies and identifying it with God’s primordial battle with chaos. Ps 2 was understood to reflect many aspects of this festival and was considered to have originally been part of it. Thus the psalm was dated either to the United or Judean monarchy with the understanding that older Egyptian and Canaanite traditions had inspired it, or it was considered to be pre-Israelite, perhaps part of early Jerusalemite royal traditions which were adopted with only minor changes by the Davidic dynasty.<sup>33</sup>

He goes on to discuss a second view that has gained more popularity among contemporary scholars. In particular he cites S. Mowinckel’s *Das Thronbesteigungsfest Yahweh und der Ursprung der Eschatologie*, H. Gunkel’s *Die Psalmen*, and G. von Rad’s *The Royal Ritual in Judah*.<sup>34</sup> These scholars dated the psalm during the Judean monarchy and saw the original life setting as being the coronation ceremony of a new king in Judah. They believed that the idea presented in the psalm of the king ruling the world was adopted from “non-Israelite cultures,” with modifications. He discusses the particular influence of Mowinckel.

Mowinckel’s studies in royal ideology laid the basis for much of the thinking of the myth and ritual school, but although he admitted that the royal Psalms show that the king was once regarded as more than human, he concluded that Israel did not accept these ideas in pure form, but changed physical divine sonship into adoption. Whereas in Egypt the king was considered literally divine, the person in whom god and people were brought together, these scholars argued that in Ps. 2:7 divine sonship is merely a legal metaphor for the covenant between Yahweh

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>34</sup>Sigmund Mowinckel *Psalmenstudien II. Das Thronbesteigungsfest Yahweh und der Ursprung der Eschatologie* (Kristiania: J. Dybwad, 1922), 3023. Herman Gunkel *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968 [1929]), 5. Gerhard von Rad . “The Royal Ritual in Judah,” *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 228.

and the Davidic king. As evidence they cited the formulaic adoption language in v. 7 and the emphasis laid on “today”, i.e. on the king’s coronation, not his birth. In this way, Israel adapted Egyptian and Canaanite ideology to its monotheistic faith.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, he cites A. Robert among others as a proponent for a post-exilic setting for Ps. 2.<sup>36</sup> While this view has not gained many adherents, the view was revived by A. Deissler, who cites Aramaisms among other characteristics of “late language,” to support his view. The idea is that Aramaisms reflect writing of a later date. Adherents believed the psalm was “the product of the messianic hope and eschatological expectations characteristic of the times.”<sup>37</sup> In the exegesis portion of this present work the views of this author will be put together in an attempt to finally seek to understand the text. Before embarking on the theological review, which will precede the exegesis portion, it is necessary to become more familiar with the literature on the meaning of Ps. 2:7 in Hebrews.

A survey of the scholarly literature concerning the meaning of Ps. 2:7 in Hebrews and the Christological significance of the citations will serve to pave the way for the theological review and exegesis that will follow. This section will survey the most reputable commentaries on the subject. There is little debate surrounding the general purpose of Ps. 2:7 in Heb. 1:5. The context makes it abundantly clear that the author is comparing the Son to the angels. “For to which of the angels did He ever say:

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>A. Robert. “Considerations sur le messianisme du Psaume II,” *RSR* 39 (1951/52), 88-98.

<sup>37</sup>Watts, 76.

‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You?’” The “He” of the passage is clearly God. “God” is the subject from the first verse on. It is God the Father who claims that this individual is His “Son.” A survey of the literature will reveal who the “Son” is and the meaning of “Today I have begotten You.”

P. E. Hughes states that it was widely accepted among Jews that Ps. 2 was in fact a messianic psalm. “The second psalm was well known, in Judaism as well as in the apostolic church, as one of the messianic psalms, and the declaration “Thou art my Son,” the application of which to the messianic figure was not in dispute.”<sup>38</sup> J. Moffatt comments along similar lines, stating that this quotation was “read as a messianic prediction – which may have been its original meaning, and certainly was the meaning attached to it by the early Christians, if not already by some circles of Judaism.”<sup>39</sup>

W. Lane gives further support, stating that, “having declared in v. 4 that the exalted son received a more excellent name than the angels, the writer now identifies that name as *uios mou*, ‘my Son.’”<sup>40</sup> B. F. Westcott, the noted exegete, cites a host of Rabbinic writings in support of the idea that the superiority of the Messiah over the angels was generally understood.<sup>41</sup> W. Lane cites evidence from Qumran that this passage was

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<sup>38</sup>Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 53.

<sup>39</sup>James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews*, (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1924), 9.

<sup>40</sup>William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* in Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 25.

<sup>41</sup>Westcott, 16.

indeed understood in a messianic sense.<sup>42</sup> It is clear that the author is speaking of the true Messiah, Jesus Christ.

A. Pink makes an interesting observation concerning the fact that verse five is in the form of a question. “The interrogative way of presenting this quotation was tantamount to saying: ‘Judge for yourselves whether what I say be true – where in the Sacred Writings is there any record of God’s addressing an angel as His “Son”?’ They could not thus judge themselves unless they were well versed in the Word.”<sup>43</sup>

While the identification of the “Son” has not been an issue of debate among scholars, the meaning of “Today I have begotten You” has raised more questions and has been the object of more comment in the literature on this and related topics. “This latter expression has occasioned not a little difficulty to some of the commentators, and, in the past, has been made the battleground of fierce theological fights.”<sup>44</sup> W. Lane holds the view that it was the exaltation specifically that was the occasion for the Son having this name conferred upon Him.

It was apparently the writer’s conviction that although Jesus was the pre-existent son of God (cf. 5:8, *kaiper on uios*, “although he was the Son”), he entered into a new dimension in the experience of sonship by virtue of his incarnation, his sacrificial death, and his subsequent death, and his subsequent exaltation. This new dimension finds expression in the legal formula of recognition, “You are *my Son*.” The connection of v 5 with vv 3c and 4 establishes that the enthronement at the Father’s right hand was the occasion when the name *uios* was conferred upon Jesus.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Lane, 25.

<sup>43</sup>Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), 49

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Lane, 25-26.

A. Pink raises the question of the eternal sonship of the Son in his commentary on the book of Hebrews. While he concedes that this verse, and the Scriptures as a whole, do not teach the eternal sonship of Christ (he states that the Scriptures are silent on the matter, and that we should remain silent where the Scriptures are silent), he does believe that the Scriptures as a whole do indeed teach the *eternality* of the Son. A. Pink holds the view that the “Today” refers not to the exaltation of Christ, but to the humiliation of Christ, namely, His incarnation.

The context as a whole shows that it is the Father addressing the Son in time, not eternity; on earth, not in heaven; in His mediatorial character, not His essential Being. Nor is there any difficulty in the “to-day have I begotten Thee,” the Holy Spirit having explained its force in Acts 13:33. There the apostle declared to the Jews that God had fulfilled the promise made unto the fathers, namely, that He had “raised up Jesus,” i.e. had sent the Messiah to them. Acts 13:33 has no reference to Christ’s resurrection, but relates to His incarnation and manifestation to Israel.<sup>46</sup>

After giving an overview of various views held by great scholars throughout the ages, P. E. Hughes, in his commentary on Hebrews, makes the following observation with Scriptural support.

But in the apostolic perspective the day of the resurrection of Jesus is the chief focal point in the interpretation of the Psalmist’s words, “Today I have begotten thee.” It is by that event, as already mentioned above, that Jesus was “designated the Son of God in power” (Rom. 1:4). Significantly, the Risen Lord is described as “the first-born from the dead” (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5). The apostle Paul specifically proclaims the resurrection as the fulfillment of Psalm 2:7 when he tells his audience in Pisidian Antioch: “We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee’” (Acts 13:33).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Pink, 50.

<sup>47</sup>Hughes, *Commentary*, 54.

P. E. Hughes goes on to explain that it is not the resurrection alone that is mind, but rather the exaltation as a whole. “In other words, resurrection, ascension, and glorification should be viewed as a unity, each contributing to the exaltation of the Son to transcendental heights of power and dignity.”<sup>48</sup>

P. Ellingworth, in his commentary on Hebrews, leans toward the view that the “Today” refers to the general exaltation of Christ, not just specifically the resurrection.<sup>49</sup> At the same time he humbly remarks that “several scholars who have examined this question in the greatest detail do not reach clear conclusions. Teodorico remarks: ‘It is wiser not to be too specific,’ and J. Moffatt comments: ‘When we ask what [the author] meant by *semeron*, we are asking a question which was not present to his mind.’”<sup>50</sup> It must be noted, however, that while J. Moffatt does counsel caution on the matter, he does say that it “might allude either to the baptism or to the resurrection of Christ in primitive Christian usage; the latter would be more congenial to our author.”<sup>51</sup>

While the author of Hebrews may not have had a specific time in mind as he quoted the psalm, the most likely time of the “Today” would be the resurrection. Acts 13:34 makes reference to God raising Jesus from the dead and in light of this context for Paul’s sermon at Antioch in Pisidia, it seems most likely that the resurrection is the “time” in an eternal sense of Jesus’ sonship. Romans 1:4 bears this out as well, where Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes that Jesus was “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>49</sup>Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary of the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 113-114.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 114.

dead.”<sup>52</sup> The implications of this conclusion will be further discussed in the exegetical section.

In assessing the literature on this topic, P. E. Hughes’ explanation that the passage was viewed as messianic by many Jews is helpful in understanding the text. J. Moffatt’s discussion along the same lines explains how even early believers understood the psalm as a prediction of the Messiah. Their research provides reason to believe that the Qumranians may have viewed the passage as being messianic, thus refuting Dunn.

Concerning the various views concerning the meaning of “Today,” A. Pink gives little support for the idea that the incarnation is in mind. It is difficult to understand his comment that Acts 13:33 makes no reference to the resurrection when the context is clearly the raising up of Jesus from the dead. J. Moffatt’s view that it is Jesus’ baptism that is in view is interesting but unsupported by Scripture. There is no clear indication in Matthew or Mark that this is the case. The voice from the Father, affirming that Jesus is His Son, does not indicate that this is a fulfillment of Ps. 2:7. If the voice of God had declared “Today I have begotten You,” there would be reason to agree with J. Moffatt. P. E. Hughes and P. Ellingworth hold views more in accord with Scripture in their affirmation that it is the resurrection and exaltation of Christ that is in mind.

### **Theological Review**

#### Christology in Hebrews

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<sup>51</sup>Moffatt, 9.

<sup>52</sup>Romans 1:4.

Before embarking on the exegetical analysis of Ps. 2:7 and its use in Hebrews, a brief study of the first four verses of Hebrews will provide a context in which to understand the entire book and the Psalm citations in particular<sup>53</sup>. It is within these four verses that the heart of the Christology of the book of Hebrews is found. This theological review will include an examination of these four verses and will demonstrate how the whole of the Christology of Hebrews is contained in seed form in this most profound introduction to this sermon.

The theological review will proceed as follows. 1) a portion from 1:1-4 will be examined, 2) citations and comments from other portions of Hebrews where this same doctrine is taught will also be examined, demonstrating how the first four verses contain in seed form the Christology of the entire book, and 3) a systematic theology of Heb. 1:1-4, and any connection with Ps. 2:7.

The opening sentence begins with the nature of God's communication in the Old Testament.<sup>54</sup> "In time past", the author states, God spoke by the prophets, and this revelation had two specific characteristics. First, it was in varying degrees.<sup>55</sup> This word refers to the fragmentary nature of the Old Testament revelation. Even though God "spoke," it was not in a form characterized by completion. It was not His final word. The author is stressing the continuity and unity of the Scriptures.

The author continues with ". . . *kai polytropos*."<sup>56</sup> God's revelation in the Old Testament was not only incomplete and occasional; it was in various forms as well.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Hughes' words sum up the general consensus among scholars concerning the first four verses of Hebrews when he says that it is "one of the most profound Christological passages to be found in the New Testament" (19).

<sup>54</sup>Charles notes that "the reader of the letter to the Hebrews is struck by the abrupt fashion with which the writer opens. Immediately he is off and running, describing the import of the Son's manifestation" (171).

<sup>55</sup>Lit. "by many portions" - *polymeros*.

<sup>56</sup>Lit. "in many manners."

"Anyone acquainted with the Old Testament would at once be able to fill in the details - the different modes (visions, angelic revelations, prophetic words and events) and the different occasions stretching across the whole vista of Old Testament history."<sup>58</sup>

In contrast to the progressive yet fragmentary revelation of Himself in the Old Testament, God has spoken in a different language in the New. Verse two reveals this new revelation as *en huio*.<sup>59</sup> Here we see that the writer indicates that Jesus is the Prophet. God has “spoken” to us through the Son. As Old Testament prophets were the mouthpiece of God, so is the Son. The author then goes on to reveal seven facts about the Son, which highlight His superiority over the imperfect revelation of God in the Old Testament.

First, the Son is “heir of all things” (v. 2). This statement echoes Ps. 2:8, “Ask of Me and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession”, and looks forward to the use of Ps. 2 in 1:5. The “raging” nations of Ps. 2 are given to the Davidic King. As a result of having the status of “Son,” Christ has as an inheritance “all the nations” mentioned in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19. When and in what sense, then, is Christ an “Heir”?

L. Berkhof explains that the atonement made sure the inheritance that Christ would receive as a result of His obedience. “The atonement secured a manifold reward for Christ as Mediator. He was constituted the life-giving Spirit, the inexhaustible source of all the blessings of salvation for sinners.”<sup>60</sup> He goes on to list the “rewards” of Christ as a result of the atonement. Among these rewards, he lists the following: “The ends of the earth for His possession and the world for His dominion. This was one of the

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<sup>57</sup>For example, see Numbers 12:6-8 for various ways God revealed Himself to prophets, and I Kings 19:9-18 for His revelation to Elijah in particular.

<sup>58</sup>Guthrie, 62.

<sup>59</sup>Lit. "in Son."

<sup>60</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932), 392.

promises made unto Him: ‘Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession’, Ps. 2:8. That this promise was fulfilled is quite evident from Heb. 2:6-9.”<sup>61</sup> While the context of Ps. 2 shows God giving the heathen to the King by their defeat, the New Testament explains that the “giving” of the heathen actually ultimately refers to their possession by Christ in salvation. While God would certainly be well within His rights in exterminating His enemies, in His infinite love He saves them. Herein lies the amazing grace of Jesus Christ.

L. Berkhof further explains that the “inheritance” involves Christ’s governing of the earth. He also gives insight into the ultimate purpose of this inheritance.

Christ was formally invested with this kingship over the universe when He was exalted at the right hand of God. It was a promised reward of His labors, Ps. 2:8,9; Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20-22; Phil. 2:9-11. This investiture was part of the exaltation of the God-man. It did not give Him any power or authority which He did not already possess as the Son of God; neither did it increase His territory. But the God-man, the Mediator was now made the possessor of this authority, and His human nature was made to share in the glory of this royal dominion. Moreover, the government of the world was now made subservient to the interests of the Church of Jesus Christ. And this kingship of Christ will last until the victory over the enemies is complete and even death is abolished. I Cor. 15:24-28. At the consummation of all things the God-man will give up the authority conferred on Him for a special purpose, since it will no more be needed. He will return His commission to God, that God may be all in all. The purpose is accomplished; mankind is redeemed; and thereby the original kingship of man is restored.<sup>62</sup>

As explained by L. Berkhof, it is a direct result of His work on earth that Christ is given the nations as an inheritance, even though there is a sense in which the inheritance has always been His. G. Milligan seeks to clarify the issue further in his work of the theology of Hebrews.

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 393.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 411.

Just as in Gal. iv. 1, 2 the heir “though he is (ideally) Lord of all “does not come to his estate “until the time appointed of the father,” so Christ, though Heir, does not gain possession of what has all along awaited Him, until, after having executed His work on earth, He enters the heavenly world. Nor need the application of the word “Heir” to Him in this state occasion any surprise. For in Scripture the heir is not so much one who is looking forward to a future possession, as one who is enjoying a present possession in virtue of a rightful title to it.<sup>63</sup>

The point G. Milligan is making is simply that Christ has eternally been the Heir in this sense.

Calvin lists this “calling of the Gentiles” in his discussion of the notable marks of the excellence of the New Testament over the Old.<sup>64</sup> While Israel is challenged to be a “light to the nations,” (Is. 49:6) and there is plenty of reference in the Old Testament to the eventual calling of the Gentiles, it is in the Great Commission that the call is made most clearly by Jesus Himself. It is as if He is claiming the promise as He calls men to reach out to the ends of the earth. This section concludes, therefore, with the realization that this phrase “Heir of all things” in Heb. 1:2 not only looks forward to the mention of the first Old Testament citation in the book, Ps. 2, but also has a much greater Christological significance in the whole of Scripture.

Second, the opening paragraph of Hebrews not only describes Jesus as Heir, but as Creator as well. “Through whom He also made the worlds” in verse two indicates that the Son played a role in the creation of all things. While the Son as Creator is not the primary Christological focus of the book, it is noteworthy that mention is made of His role in creation on two other occasions. Verses ten through twelve of chapter one are a

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<sup>63</sup>George Milligan, *The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899), 86.

<sup>64</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, ), 461.

quotation of Ps. 102:25-27 and state that the Son “laid the foundation of the earth” and that “the heavens are the work of Your hands.” It is interesting that in making the point that the Son is superior to the angels, the author refers to the His role in creation twice in the first chapter. No angel was involved in the creation of the universe. The Son’s pre-existence is asserted in this statement that He is Creator.

G. Milligan explains that “this Being, in whom all things are consummated, is the same, through whose instrumentality ‘the ages’ – the successive periods of the world’s history, have already been called into being, and who therefore existed before them.”<sup>65</sup> The pre-existence of Christ is taught elsewhere in Hebrews (1:10; 7:24). As D. L. Mealand reveals, “Pre-existence is also implied by statements about the eternal nature of the Son who is compared in the respect to Melchizedek.”<sup>66</sup>

What significance, then, does the pre-existence of the Son have in relation to Ps. 2:7 and its use in Hebrews? The statements about the pre-existence of the Son shed great light on the meaning of Ps. 2:7. There never was a time when the Father conferred anything upon the Son that he did not already possess. The Son has always been the Son. This illuminates much of the debate over the nature of the “Today I have begotten You” of Ps. 2:7. The fact that the Son is pre-existent affirms that He is God. When Ps. 2:7 is understood in the broader Christological context of the entire book of Hebrews, the adoptionist heresy is avoided.

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<sup>65</sup>Milligan, 74.

<sup>66</sup>David Mealand, “The Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Modern Churchman* 22 (1979): 180.

The question naturally arises as to the specific role of the Son in Creation, and to the nature of his creating. Concerning the specific role of the Son, W. Grudem comments.

God the Father was the primary agent in initiating the act of creation. But the Son and the Holy Spirit were also active. The Son is often described as the one “through” whom creation came about. “All things were made *through* him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3). Paul says there is “one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through* whom are all things and *through* whom we exist” (Col. 1:16). These passages give a consistent picture of the Son as the active agent carrying out the plans and directions of the Father.<sup>67</sup>

L. Berkhof uses the terminology that “All things are at once *out of* the Father, *through* the Son, and *in* the Holy Spirit.”<sup>68</sup> When the author states that God made “the worlds” (v. 2) through the Son, he is in full agreement with John’s statement in the first chapter of his gospel. “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”<sup>69</sup> While Scripture does not give the specific details, it is evident that Jesus Christ, the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, played a significant role in the creation of the universe. This proves beyond any doubt that He is superior to the angels, which is the main point the author is making in the first two chapters of Hebrews. This leads to the question of the nature of God’s creating, a question answered to some degree by the author of Hebrews.

While the doctrine of Creation is not the issue brought to the fore in most discussions on the book of Hebrews, the author does give considerable insight into the nature of God’s act of creating. Not only is the Son’s role in creation introduced, but the

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<sup>67</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 126.

<sup>68</sup>Berkhof, 129.

<sup>69</sup>John 1:3.

fact that He created all out of nothing seems to be the meaning of another significant text. “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”<sup>70</sup> Theologians often use the term *ex nihilo* to describe the manner in which God created. He made all things, literally “out of nothing.” While the term itself is not found in Scripture, the concept is clearly taught.

The Son played a significant role in creating the universe, and this creation was a creation of all that is from absolutely nothing. Both Christological features explored thus far in this section have great implications concerning the key text under examination in this work, Ps. 2:7. The fact that Christ is Heir reveals His great love for humanity in that He shares His rewards with the undeserving. The kingship aspect of Ps. 2 must be understood in a different light when viewed from a New Testament perspective. The fact that Christ is Creator reveals that He is eternal, and therefore did not “become” God in any sense. The testimony of Acts 13:33 alone could lead to confusion and heresy. “God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He raised up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’”<sup>71</sup> Without the testimony of Heb., Ps. 2:7 could be misunderstood on many levels. God has, however, revealed the truth of the passage by inspiring its usage in the midst of Christological passages which illumine its meaning.

Having established that the Son is the Heir of all things and Creator of all things, the author now makes a firm statement about the very essence of the Son of God. The

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<sup>70</sup>Hebrews 11:3.

<sup>71</sup>Acts 13:33.

third and fourth facts about the Son will be considered together. Both have to do with His nature in relation to God. The first of these two expresses the idea that the Son is the “reflection” of God’s glory (*apaugasma tes doxes*).<sup>72</sup> “The idea is of the radiance which burst out of a brilliant light.”<sup>73</sup> Again, there is a connection with the first chapter of John. After stating that the Word became flesh, John explains that “we beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”<sup>74</sup>

A very similar idea is expressed in *charakter tes hupostaseos*. This phrase expresses the reality that the Son is completely similar to the Father. D. Guthrie explains the theological significance of the phrase.

The word used here for stamp (*charakter*) is the word for a die or an engraving. It is highly expressive since a stamp on a wax seal will bear the same image as the engraving on the seal. The illustration cannot be pressed too far, for it must not be supposed that the Son is formally distinct from the Father as the stamp is from the impression it creates. There is nevertheless an exact correspondence between the two. This statement itself contains a deep truth, for the exact resemblance relates to God’s nature (*hypostaseos*). The statement is not unimportant to the theological thinker, for it supports the view that Jesus was of the same nature as God. If so, no difference can be made between the nature of the Father and the nature of the Son.<sup>75</sup>

The author of Hebrews continues to discuss the deity of the Son in the catena of Old Testament citations in the first chapter. In verse six the angels are commanded to worship the Son. With the obvious monotheistic background of the Jewish audience no other conclusion can be reached other than that the author is ascribing deity to the Son.

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<sup>72</sup>Lit. “the radiance of the glory.”

<sup>73</sup>Guthrie, 66.

<sup>74</sup>John 1:14.

<sup>75</sup>Guthrie, 66-67.

In verse eight the Son is called “God” and, as discussed earlier, is said to have participated in the creation of the world. Verse ten points to the eternity of the Son. Further discussion about the significance of the deity of the Son will serve to illumine the meaning of Ps. 2:7 as it is used by the writer and how it would have been understood by the original audience.

While the deity of Jesus has been the issue of much heated debate over the centuries, the text under examination here makes it plain that the Son and the Father are in fact equal in essence. P. E. Hughes explains that the NIV translation of Heb. 1:3, “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” brings out the true meaning that “the glory of the Son *is identical* with the glory of the Father.”<sup>76</sup> Jesus claimed that whoever has set eyes on Him has seen the Father.<sup>77</sup> The words here in the opening paragraph of Hebrews echo the words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossians. “He is the image of the invisible God.”<sup>78</sup> G. Milligan gives an eloquent comment on the passage.

For although the exact interpretation to be given to the words “the effulgence of God’s glory and the very image of his substance” is much disputed, and though in dealing with such transcendent mysteries all human language is necessarily imperfect, the relationship which they imply can hardly be satisfied by mere general dependence or likeness between the Son and God, but can result only from oneness of being. The Son is “the effulgence” (*apaugasma*) of the Father, because not by any isolated ray, nor by the continual shining forth of rays, but completely and fully He manifests His source. He is the “express image” (*character*) because, along with this unbroken connection of Being with the Father, He is yet possessed of a true Personality, in the “essence” of God finds

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<sup>76</sup>Hughes, 20 (italics mine).

<sup>77</sup>John 14:9

<sup>78</sup>Colossians 1:15.

perfect expression.<sup>79</sup>

How then does this fit into the overall argument of the first two chapters of Hebrews, and even into the chapters that follow? M. J. Erickson explains that “the argument here is that the Son is superior to angels (1:4-2:9), Moses (3:1-6), and high priests (4:14-5:10). He is superior for he is not merely a human or an angel, but something higher, namely, God.”<sup>80</sup>

Whereas the previous four facts about the Son dealt more with who He is, the last three deal more with what He does. The author shifts from the Person of Christ to the work of Christ. He “upholds all things” (v. 3). The idea here is that the Son, in His sovereignty, “carries all things forward on their appointed course.”<sup>81</sup> He is the Sustainer of the universe.

Theologians have recognized this as a part of the broader aspect of God’s governing of the universe, commonly referred to as His Providence.<sup>82</sup> In his discussion of the doctrine of Providence as Preservation, M. J. Erickson states:

Preservation is God’s maintaining his creation in existence. It involves God’s protection of his creation against harm and destruction, and his provision for the needs of the elements or members of creation.

Numerous biblical passages speak of God’s preserving the creation as a whole . . . After a statement about the role of Christ in creation, Paul links him to the continuation of the creation as well: “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). The writer of Hebrews speaks of the Son as “upholding the universe by his word of power” (1:3).<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Milligan, 76.

<sup>80</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 689.

<sup>81</sup>Bruce, 49. See also Colossians 1:17.

<sup>82</sup>Hughes sees the statement as referring to the Son as “the agent of the divine providential control of the cosmos throughout the course of its history” (21).

The idea of the Son “upholding all things” affirms His rule and power. It is easy to see the connection of this truth and the truth of Ps. 2:7. It has already been noted, and will be elaborated upon later as well, that the psalm is a royal psalm. The rule of the king is evident and the facts concerning the kingship of the Son are clear. The enthronement of the Son includes His sovereign rule over the creation. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is King of kings. He is God, and He rules from His throne. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the author of Hebrews brings to light this glorious reality.

The last two of the seven facts concerning the Son focus specifically on His work of redemption and exaltation. It is worthy of note that the idea that Jesus “purged our sins,” a thought that expresses His closeness and intimacy with humanity, is contrasted with the phrase before it, namely, that He “upholds all things by the word of His power,” an idea that expresses His remoteness and transcendence.<sup>84</sup>

The purging of sin is a doctrine taught repeatedly throughout Hebrews. It is first mentioned in 1:3 – “when He had by Himself purged our sins.” This is the first mention in the book of the priesthood of Christ. The rest of the verse, “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” makes mention of His kingship. Heb. 7:27 states that Christ “offered up Himself” for the sins of others. Chapter nine states that He entered the Most Holy Place with His own blood (9:12). The same chapter explains that He “put away sin” and that He was offered once to “bear the sins of many” (9:26, 28). Finally, Heb. 10:12 states that He offered “one sacrifice for sins.” The general idea is that Jesus made a “cleansing” for sin, the primary meaning of the word translated “purged” in the NKJV.

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<sup>83</sup>Erickson, 388.

<sup>84</sup>Guthrie, 68.

L. Berkhof sheds light on the nature of the “cleansing” in his discussion of the atonement. Drawing from insights from Dr. Shedd, he explains the difference between personal atonement and vicarious atonement.

Personal atonement is provided by the offending party; vicarious atonement by the offended party. Personal atonement would have excluded the element of mercy; vicarious atonement represents the highest form of mercy. Personal atonement would have been forever in the making and hence could not result in redemption; vicarious atonement leads to reconciliation and life everlasting.<sup>85</sup>

Christ’s atonement was not only a “cleansing” of sin, and a vicarious sacrifice, but was indeed the only way whereby men might be saved. W. Grudem gives an insightful explanation as he discusses the specific focus of Hebrews.

The epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes that Christ *had* to suffer for our sins: ‘He *had to* be made like His brethren in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation [lit. propitiation] for the sins of the people’ (Heb. 2:17). The author of Hebrews also argues that since ‘it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins’ (Heb. 10:4), a better sacrifice is required (Heb. 9:23). Only the blood of Christ, that is, His death, would be able really to take away sins (Heb. 9:25-26). There was no other way for God to save us than for Christ to die in our place.<sup>86</sup>

Likewise, Calvin, in his discussion of the priesthood of Christ, makes the following comment:

For, as has been said, we or our prayers have no access to God unless Christ, as our High Priest, having washed away our sins, sanctifies us and obtains for us that grace from which the uncleanness of our transgressions and vices debars us. Thus we see that we must begin from the death of Christ in order that the efficacy and benefit of his priesthood may reach us.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Berkhof, 375-76.

<sup>86</sup>Grudem, 249.

<sup>87</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 502.

By mentioning the atonement in these terms in the opening verses of the epistle the author is setting the stage for further discussion of this glorious doctrine later on (9:11-10:14).

Finally, the author ends the opening to his epistle with a fitting conclusion, stating that Jesus “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High, having become so much better than the angels” (vv. 3-4). This picture of the exaltation of Christ, an allusion to Ps. 110:1, prepares the reader for the discussion of the comparison of the Son and the angels, which culminates with a direct quotation from the psalm: “Sit at my right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool” (1:13). The idea here is that Jesus is King.

The mention of Christ “sitting” is seen in several places throughout the book. The last of the catena of Old Testament quotations in the first chapter is Ps. 110:1, “Sit at My right hand . . .” (1:13). Christ is pictured as a High Priest who is “seated” in 8:1. Jesus is said to have “sat down at the right hand of God” after having offered a sacrifice for sins (10:12).

The image of Christ “sitting” is significant. P. E. Hughes explains that the picture of Christ being seated in heaven symbolizes two truths: first, that the work He came to do is finished, and second, that His being seated symbolizes that He is in a position of honor and authority, namely, a throne.<sup>88</sup> In stark contrast to the Levitical priests who continued year after year in the offering of a sacrifice, Christ made one offering which sufficed to do what the Old Testament priests could never do. The sacrifice made on the Day of Atonement never removed or atoned for sin. It only foreshadowed the final sacrifice of the Lamb of God. The image of being seated emphasizes a completed deed,

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<sup>88</sup>Hughes, 21.

namely, the purchase of redemption for the elect. At the same time, as P. E. Hughes explains, the image reminds us of His position of glory, honor and authority. He sits on His throne and rules over all.

It is little wonder that the opening verses of Hebrews have been referred to as “one of the most profound and concise Christological passages to be found in the New Testament.”<sup>89</sup> In four brief verses Christ is seen in His three offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. He is “Prophet (he himself is the divine Word), as Priest (he made purification for our sins), and as King (he is enthroned in glory). The Christology here propounded in fact sets the tone for the whole epistle.”<sup>90</sup> Nowhere is more said about Christ in so few verses. In summary, regarding His Person, He is Heir and Creator. In His essence He is God, and He therefore shines forth the very character of the Father. He is the Sovereign Sustainer of all things. Finally, He is an exalted Redeemer, who after having made purification for sins, revealed His supremacy and kingship by taking the place of honor and victory at the very right hand of the Father. The opening verses have set the stage not only for the discussion in chapter one, but also for the general argument of the entire epistle. In the next ten verses the author quotes seven passages from the Old Testament which point to Christ’s superiority over the angels. It is significant to note that of the seven citations five come from the Psalter. It is to one of these citations that we now turn.

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 21.

## Christology of Psalm 2:7 in Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5

A messianic interpretation of Ps. 2 did not involve a departure from common Jewish exegesis.<sup>91</sup> To apply the psalm to Jesus Christ was a natural progression in exegetical tradition. It was expected that the Messiah would fulfill the role of “Son of God” and that he would be the Davidic King described in Ps. 2. The author of Hebrews strongly emphasizes the sonship of Christ. “The term ‘son’ is applied to Christ thirteen times in Hebrews.”<sup>92</sup>

But when did Jesus *become* the Son of God. Ps. 2:7 seems at first glance to support the second century Christological error of adoptionism.

According to this view Christ was originally a man who, by a special decree of God, was born of a virgin and who, after having been thoroughly tested, was given supernatural powers by the Holy Spirit at the time of his baptism. As a reward for his sterling character and his achievements, he was raised from the dead and adopted into the sphere of the Godhead. He was thus a man who became God.<sup>93</sup>

Hebrews sheds light on this issue in that there is not a time, according to the author, when Christ is not ‘a son’ or even when it is not proper to refer to him as *the* Son.<sup>94</sup> He did not “rise” to sonship through some process. It is important to distinguish

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<sup>91</sup>Ellingworth, 112.

<sup>92</sup>Parsons, 201. See 1:2, 5; 5:2, 8; 2:6; 3:6; 4:14; 5:5, 8; 6:6; 7:3, 28; 10:29. Four of these places are OT texts quoted by the writer.

<sup>93</sup>Everett F. Harrison, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Carl F. H. Henry, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 26.

<sup>94</sup>Kenneth Schenck, “Keeping His Appointment: Creation and Enthronement in Hebrews” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 66 (June 1997): 91.

between Christ's *essence* and His *function*. Schenck uses the terms *identity* and *role* to express the same idea.

Here a distinction between *identity* and *role* can be made. At his enthronement, Christ truly *becomes* Son in the sense that he assumes his royal office and takes his divine 'appointment', but in his *identity* he has always been the Son, the one whom God had destined to be enthroned from the foundation of the world (cf. 9:26), who bears God's purpose for humanity (cf. 2:9) . . . One might say, thus, that although Christ is always the Son in terms of his *identity* (even before his exaltation, as a kind of 'heir apparent'), he can only be said to be 'enthroned' as Son in the inheritance of his royal *office* when he is exalted to God's right hand.<sup>95</sup>

L. Berkhof explains the same concept using the terms *economic* and *ontological* Trinity.<sup>96</sup>

There is a clear distinction between the role the Son fulfills as the second Person of the Trinity and His essence as being one with the Father. Philippians 2 expresses the Son's emptying of Himself in obedience to the Father, but the Son has always been of the same essence as the Father. J. Moffatt explains more fully.

The resurrection or exaltation may mark, as it does for Paul, the fully operative sonship of Christ, the only way to inherit or possess the universe being to endure the suffering and death which purified human sin and led to the enthronement of Christ. Our author holds that this divine being was sent into the world because he was God's Son, and that he freely undertook his mission for God's other sons on earth.<sup>97</sup>

The testimony of the New Testament is that Jesus is God, and has always been God.

F. F. Bruce lends support to J. Moffatt's statement, explaining that "he who was the Son of God from everlasting entered into the full exercise of all the prerogatives implied by

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<sup>95</sup>Schenck, 99. Also see Romans 1:4 for the same idea.

<sup>96</sup>Berkhof, 95.

<sup>97</sup>Moffatt, xli.

His Sonship when, after His suffering had proved the completeness of his obedience, he was raised to the Father's right hand."<sup>98</sup>

The above insights go far in refuting such assertions that the language of Hebrews is 'adoptionistic.' "At the same time there is more 'adoptionistic' language in Hebrews than in any other NT document."<sup>99</sup> The Son is clearly described in the strongest terms which equate Him with the Father. He is one with the Father in essence and is seen as being worshiped as well.

The point of the use of Ps. 2:7 in Heb. 1:5 is to highlight that the title "Son" is superior to that of "messenger." One may object that angels are actually called "sons of God" in certain contexts (Gen. 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7).<sup>100</sup> While angels may be called "sons of God" in a corporate sense, "no one of them is ever called the son of God in terms like these, which single out the person addressed and give him a status apart."<sup>101</sup> Clarification is necessary on this point. Angels are *created* sons of God. Believers are *adopted* sons of God (Rom. 8). Finally, Christ is the *unique* Son of God. The Son is completely unique and set apart by His title which, according to the psalm quotation, He "received *today*." But when is *today*?

Acts 13:33 sheds light on this question. Paul is on his first missionary journey and is speaking to members of the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. Addressing them as "men of Israel" (v. 16), Paul recounts the faithfulness of God to His people throughout

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<sup>98</sup>Bruce, 54.

<sup>99</sup>Dunn, 52.

<sup>100</sup>While some view Genesis 6:2, 4 as referring to angels, the Reformed view understands these individuals to be humans from the godly lineage. The intermarriage is understood to be between those of the seed of the Woman and those of the seed of the Serpent (See Genesis 3:15).

<sup>101</sup>Dunn, 53.

the ages. He continues by explaining that Jesus was the promised Messiah who was put to death. But God raised Him from the dead, and it was in the context of His resurrection that Paul quotes Ps. 2:7. The *Today* of Ps. 2:7, then, refers to His resurrection and subsequent exaltation to the right hand of God, a position of authority, power and honor. This raises the issue of the eternal generation of the Son. Articles twenty-one and twenty-two of the Athanasian Creed state the doctrine. “The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten.” Concerning the use of Ps. 2:7 in Heb. 1:5, it must be concluded that the author is stressing the superiority of Christ over angels, using a passage whose background stresses the rise of the Messiah to a state of exaltation. In short, the Kingship of Jesus is behind the quotation, “You are My Son, Today I have Begotten You.”

Theologians use the phrase “eternal generation of the Son” to explain the act of “begetting,” a word used to describe the Son in several other passages (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; Heb. 11:17; I John 4:9). L. Berkhof gives an insightful discussion of what he refers to as “filiation,” the specific personal property of the Son as set apart from the personal properties of the Father and the Spirit.<sup>102</sup> He describes the act as an eternal one and one that is a “generation of the personal subsistence rather than of the divine essence of the Son.”<sup>103</sup> L. Berhof’s definition of this spiritual act is worth quoting in its entirety.

It is that eternal and necessary act of the first person in the Trinity, whereby He, within the divine Being, is the ground of a second personal subsistence like His own, and puts this second person in possession of the whole divine essence, without any division, alienation, or change.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Berkhof, 93.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 94.

The author uses Ps. 2:7 in Heb. 5:5, however, for a different purpose. It is not to stress the coronation of Jesus or His superiority over angels. As the context indicates,<sup>105</sup> it is priesthood that dominates the discussion in chapter five. The same God who proclaims the Messiah as King, appoints Him as High Priest. The point the author is making is that Jesus did not “glorify Himself” (v. 5a) in the acquisition of this position. Calvin explains.

It is the same as though he had said, ‘Christ did not make himself a high priest, but God.’ And the reason why he speaks of God as having said, ‘My Son,’ &c., seems to be this, - to shew that he who made him king (for the reference in Ps. ii. is to his appointment as a king) made him also a high priest. And this is confirmed by the next quotation from Ps. Cx. ; for in the first verse he is spoken of as a king, and then in ver. 4 his priesthood is mentioned.<sup>106</sup>

It is important to note the contrast between Aaron, a priest only, and the the Son, Priest and King. The reference to Ps. 2:7 highlights yet another proof of the superiority of the Son over Aaron. The reference to Ps. 110 further stresses the point, as noted in Calvin’s comment, that the Son fulfills both Old Testament offices of priest and king.

### **Biblical Analysis**

#### Psalm 2 - The Historical Context

In an attempt to better understand the use of Ps. 2:7 in Hebrews, this section will explore the historical setting of Ps. 2 in general, including a discussion of the psalm’s genre and original *Sitz im Leben*, or “life situation.” A statement concerning the author of the psalm and its literary divisions will be followed by an overview in which the verse quoted in Hebrews will be better understood in its original context.

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<sup>105</sup>See pages on “The Immediate Context in Hebrews where Psalm 2 is Quoted” of the present work.

<sup>106</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews* trans. John Owens (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 118.

Because the theme of kingship is so prominent in this psalm, it has generally been recognized as a royal psalm. While the details concerning the original setting of this particular psalm are unknown, it is evident that it commemorates the enthronement of a king. P. Ellingworth explains that these psalms typically focus on a coronation.

A human ruler, anointed as king in Jerusalem, is promised that God will defend him against foreign enemies, and make ‘the heathen’ his ‘inheritance’ (*kleronomia*; cf. Heb. 1:2, 4). It is uncertain how far the psalm in its original setting refers to the future, but its preservation in the Psalter suggests that it was seen to have wider significance than the enthronement of any particular king.<sup>107</sup>

In further support for the claim that Ps. 2 is indeed a royal psalm, F. F. Bruce states that the language used in the psalm was widely common to enthronement ceremonies throughout the Ancient Near East.<sup>108</sup> Customs concerning the coronation of a king in Israel were not unlike those of their neighboring nations. It was a common ancient notion that a king became aware of his divine sonship at his accession to the throne.<sup>109</sup> While the Israelite king was not considered as deity<sup>110</sup> as was the ruler of

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<sup>107</sup>Ellingworth, 112.

<sup>108</sup>Bruce, 53.

<sup>109</sup>Moffatt, xli.

<sup>110</sup>For a discussion of the views concerning the original setting of the psalm, see the following: James Watts, “Psalm 2 in the Context of Biblical Theology,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, 12 June 1990, 74–76. “Three major positions may be distinguished . . . The first argues that the psalm provides *prima facie* evidence for the belief that the king in Israel and Judah must have celebrated the New Year’s festival in which the king played a cultic role, reenacting his enthronement with God and his victory over foreign enemies and identifying it with God’s primordial battle with chaos. Ps. 2 was understood to reflect many aspects of this festival and was considered to have originally been a part of it.

A different line of interpretation . . . dated the psalm to the Judean monarchy but found its original setting not in an annual New Year’s festival but in the coronation ceremony of a new king. They acknowledged that the psalm’s idealistic picture of the king’s world rule and the notion of his divine sonship were adopted from non-Israelite cultures, but only with crucial modifications . . . but although he (Mowinckel) admitted that the royal Psalms show that the king was once regarded as more than human, he concluded that Israel did not accept these ideas in pure form, but changed the physical divine sonship into adoption. Whereas in Egypt the king was considered literally divine . . . these scholars argued that in Ps. 2:7 divine sonship is merely a legal metaphor for the covenant between Yahweh and the Davidic king.

certain other kings in the Ancient Near East, he was considered to be a vice-regent of Yahweh. The language of this psalm suggests strongly that its setting was the coronation of some human king.

T. Longman explains that there are two kinds of “kingship psalms,” one that proclaims God as King, and another that focuses on Israel’s human king.<sup>111</sup> Ps. 2 is unique in that it is an integration of these two kinds of royal psalms. The divine king and his human counterpart are contrasted with worldly rulers, the “kings of the earth,” who oppose “the Lord and His anointed.”<sup>112</sup> The psalm provides a fitting context for the author of Hebrews who stresses to his readers the necessity of both the divinity and humanity of Christ throughout the epistle.

While there is disagreement as to the actual king whose coronation is being commemorated, the author of the psalm is known due to a citing of the psalm by Peter and John in a prayer in which they regard the psalm as coming from “the mouth of Your servant David.”<sup>113</sup> Calvin argues that the psalm was written not only by David, but also about David himself. “It cannot be denied but that this was spoken of David, that is, as he sustained the person of Christ. Then the things found in this psalm must have been shadowed forth in David, but were fully accomplished in Christ.”<sup>114</sup> Spurgeon follows closely in the tradition of Calvin in his exposition of this psalm. He explains that we

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A third approach dated Ps. 2 in the postexilic period and . . . proponents of this late date suggest that the psalm is a product of the messianic hope and eschatological expectations characteristic of the times.”

<sup>111</sup>Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 34.

<sup>112</sup>NKJV, Note on Psalm 2.

<sup>113</sup>Acts 13:25.

<sup>114</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 40.

must read it with the “eye of faith,” seeing in this psalm “the final triumph of our Lord Jesus Christ over all his enemies.”<sup>115</sup> He explains that if the reader simply reads the psalm without understanding the messianic nature of it, it will seem “exaggerated,” but if the reader understands that Christ is the true and ultimate focus of the psalm, the “colouring which may perhaps seem too bold and glaring for the king of Israel, will no longer appear so when laid upon his great Antitype.”<sup>116</sup>

A brief look at the divisions of this psalm of David will serve to better understand the context of the verse quoted by the author of Hebrews.

#### Outline of Psalm 2

- I. Wonder at Rebellious Nations (1-3)
- II. Yahweh’s Mocking Response (4-6)
- III. The King Relates God’s Affirmation of Him and His Rule Over the Nations (7-9)
- IV. Nations are Warned of the Effects of Rebellion (10-12)<sup>117</sup>

The psalm opens with a question which communicates awe to these nations that would dare come against the Lord. Their rebellion is described in violent terms in verse three. God’s initial response is one of laughter as He derides the futile efforts of the nations. God’s answer to this rebellion is to install His King (v. 6), Who is also declared “Son” in verse seven. This Son receives as an inheritance the very nations who were acting in rebellion against the Lord and His Anointed. Finally, the author advises, in light

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<sup>115</sup>Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: An Expository and Devotional Commentary on the Psalms* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 11.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>Watts, 74.

of these truths, that the kings of the earth be instructed and that they fear the Lord and swear loyalty<sup>118</sup> to Him, “lest He be angry” (v. 12).

In summary, verse seven is a reference to the Davidic king, God’s “Anointed” (v. 2), who is declared “Son” and given the Gentile nations as an inheritance (vv. 7-8). At this point the question arises as to this title given to the human king. In what sense is the king a “Son of God”? And how is this to be understood in a strictly monotheistic setting?

J. Watts raises the question and explains that “it is more than an exegetical problem. It is a theological problem because of the Old Testament’s pervasive insistence on the incomparability and uniqueness of Yahweh.”<sup>119</sup> The problem of the king being referred to as the “son” of God is to be understood in light of God’s special relationship with David in His covenant with him. God promised David He would be a “Father” to him.<sup>120</sup> In this role God vowed to chasten his “son” when he commits iniquity and to reveal His fatherly mercy to him as well. “Thus just as the Mosaic covenant between God and the people was personalized as the relationship between parent and children, the Davidic covenant between God and king was described in terms of adoption.”<sup>121</sup> Unlike the common ascribing of deity to the king in Egyptian culture, the title had no connotation of deity on the part of the human king in Israelite thinking. It denoted the

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<sup>118</sup>See I Kings 19:18 for the custom of showing loyalty to a deity by kissing its image (in this case, the image of Baal).

<sup>119</sup>Watts, 76.

<sup>120</sup>II Samuel 7:14

<sup>121</sup>Watts, 77-78.

intimacy of the relationship between the Davidic king and God.<sup>122</sup> The understanding of the title “Son” in this context is vital to a true sense of what the author of Hebrews is communicating in the first chapter of the epistle. It is to the immediate context of this passage that we now turn.

#### The Immediate Context in Hebrews Where Psalm Two is Quoted

The author of Hebrews cites Ps. 2 on two separate occasions, in 1:5 and 5:5. The context of the first citation is clearly the superiority of Christ. After the concise, yet profound introduction to the epistle (vv. 1-4) discussed above, the author begins to compare Christ to the angels. This discussion stretches over the first two chapters of Hebrews. The entire first chapter consists of a “catena of OT quotations whose primary purpose is to demonstrate the superiority of the pre-existent Jesus over the angels.”<sup>123</sup> At first the reason for such a beginning to the sermon seems strange. Out of nowhere the writer simply begins to cite reasons, backed by Old Testament support, that the Son is better than angels. F. F. Bruce’s summary of the section reveals the reason behind such a beginning. “It was through angels that Moses’ law was communicated, and its sanctions were severe enough; how much more perilous must it be to ignore the saving message brought by no angel, but by Jesus, the Son of God.”<sup>124</sup> A primary purpose of the author is to establish the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old. He begins by firmly

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<sup>122</sup>Scholars have recognized the similarities between ancient Near Eastern treaties and the covenant between Yahweh and His people. The Great King is Yahweh who enters into a relationship with His vassal people, Israel. There are stipulations to the treaty, blessings and curses and witnesses to the ratification of the treaty. The Davidic king played the role of mediator between God and the people in the covenant. This truth highlights the truly heinous nature of the apostasy of the wicked kings of Israel (Longman, 53-57; and NKJV, note at Ps. 89:26).

<sup>123</sup>Parsons, 202.

establishing the superiority of the *Mediator* of the New Covenant. Implied in this argument is the truth that the covenant with the superior mediator is the superior covenant. How then was the Old Covenant “mediated”? Moses indicates that it was through angels.

The Lord came from Sinai,  
And dawned on them from Seir;  
He shone forth from Mount Paran,  
And He came with ten thousands of saints;  
From His right hand  
Came a fiery law for them.<sup>125</sup>

There is New Testament support for this truth. Paul appeals to the fact that the law was “appointed through angels” to support his argument that it was inferior to the unmediated promise to Abraham.<sup>126</sup> Stephen, in his sermon recorded in Acts 7, states that the law was received “by the direction of angels” (Acts 7:53). The phrase, “to which of the angels did He ever say”(vv. 5, 13) is used twice in the first chapter and is juxtaposed to the phrase, “but to the Son He says” (v. 8). In addition, the word *palin* is used along with *kai* to stress the overwhelming Old Testament support for the assertion he is making. While it is generally agreed that this is the purpose of the argument, some see in this opening, and in subsequent portions of the epistle, reason to believe that the primary purpose of such an argument is to deal with a Jewish apocalyptic movement

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<sup>124</sup>Bruce , xix.

<sup>125</sup>Dt. 33:2.

<sup>126</sup>Bruce, 67.

among the Qumran Essenes.<sup>127</sup> Whatever the case, the writer sees his primary purpose in the opening chapters of his epistle as establishing the superiority of Christ over the angels, and in this context he makes his first quotation of Ps. 2:7. He returns to the same verse in 5:5. In that verse the writer refers to both the King and to the High Priest, to both the royal and priestly office.

An overview of the section from chapter one to the citation of the psalm passage in chapter five will serve to help understand the meaning of the text as it is used there. After the discussion of the superiority of Christ in chapters one and two, the author then focuses on Christ's superiority to Moses in 3:1-6. Moses is described as a "servant" in God's house (3:5), whereas Jesus is the Creator of the house (3:3) and is over the house (3:6). A warning section follows in which the readers are encouraged to not follow the example of the hard-heartedness of Israel in the wilderness (3:7-19). The theme of chapter four is the promise of rest to those who heed the warning of 3:7-19. At the end of chapter four the author draws the conclusion that "since we have a great High priest who has passed through then heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" (4:14).

The first four verses of chapter five give the general requirements for a priest. He will soon demonstrate that Jesus meets these criteria. "Christ entirely meets the qualifications of a high priest specified in vv. 1-4, namely divine appointment (v. 4) and solidarity with humanity (vv. 1-3)."<sup>128</sup> The author has been building up to, and beginning

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<sup>127</sup>Charles, 171-178. Also Kistemaker argues that "in the Epistle to the Hebrews there is no such indication of angel-worship. Instead the humiliation and the unsurpassing glory and power of the Son are compared to the position and function of angels." Simon Kistemaker *The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Amsterdam: Wed. G. Van Soest N. V., 1961), 134.

to make the argument, that because Jesus is our High Priest, and His priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood, our dependence should be on Him for the removal of sins. It is in the middle of this argument that the author returns to Ps. 2 for support.

### **Church History Review**

Having reviewed the relevant literature on the topic, surveyed the implications from a theological perspective and delved into an exegetical examination of the text, attention now turns to a general overview of Church history as it relates to the focus of this work. There will be two foci of this section, namely, an overview of the general topic of Christology followed by an overview of the views individuals have held concerning the meaning of Ps. 2:7 in particular.

#### Christology in the History of the Church

This survey of the Church's views on Christology will begin with an overview of the ideas in the Early Church. A summary of the developments leading up to and following the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon will be followed by an examination of the views of men such as Augustine and Aquinas. Reformation views on Christology will precede the new developments of the Enlightenment, and finally, new developments in the twentieth century.

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<sup>128</sup>Ellingworth, 281.

In the first generation of believers following the death of the apostles, one notes no significant statement on any specific Christological issue as would later develop in the events leading up to the Council of Nicea in 325. In the writings of men like Ignatius, for example, one reads exhortational epistles to various churches. Instead of discussing Christology, the Church would expend its energies on defending the faith against the attacks of paganism. Apologists of the second century like Justin Martyr and later Tertullian aimed at defending the Christian faith against the charges of atheism, cannibalism, incest and anti-social action.<sup>129</sup> There was little talk of the essence of the Son or His relation to the Father, much less the true meaning of Ps. 2:7 in Hebrews.

Another group in the early Church, however, began a way of thinking that would eventually lead to the dispute between Arius and Athanasius at Nicea. Whereas the apologists sought to defend the faith against outside attack, the Polemicists, as historians call them, “endeavored to meet the challenge of false teaching.”<sup>130</sup> Men like Irenaeus, the anti-gnostic writer of the second century, Clement of Alexandria and Origen focused specifically on the attacking of heresy in the church.

It is during this time that the beginnings of a more specific Christology develop. Origen, for example, taught a “subordinationist Christology” as he insisted that prayers be directed to the Father alone.<sup>131</sup> L. Berkhof further explains why the Christology of Origen was not satisfactory. “While he was the first to explain the relation of the Father

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<sup>129</sup>Earl E. Cairns *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 105.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>131</sup>Geoffrey W. Bromily *Historical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 45.

to the son by employing the idea of eternal generation, he defined this so as to involve the subordination of the Second Person to the First *in respect to essence*.”<sup>132</sup> This sheds light on how he would have understood the meaning of Ps. 2:7. Origen would likely have used this passage to support his view that the Father and the Son are equal.

In these early centuries, the tendency was to debate the nature of the Trinity and then, narrowing down, to debate the specific essence of Christ, the Son. There is an obvious connection, for the manner in which one understands the Trinity will inevitably color the conclusions about the essence of God the Son.

The Trinitarian controversy came to a head in the struggle between Arius and Athanasius. It was the view of Arius that the Son was actually created by the Father, a view similar to that of the modern-day fellowship, Jehovah’s Witnesses. Arius of Alexandria taught that the Son was “created out of nothing before the world was called into being, and for that very reason was not eternal nor of the divine essence.”<sup>133</sup>

Athanasius countered with the view held by the majority of evangelicals today, namely, that the Son was of the *same substance*, or essence, as the Father. He would have asserted that Ps. 2:7, when compared to and understood in the light of the whole of Scripture, teaches that the Son is in no way subordinate to the Father in terms of His essence. The same orthodox view was held by Augustine who in his *De Trinitate* “stresses the unity of essence and the Trinity of Persons. Each one of the three Persons possesses the entire essence and with each one of the other Persons.”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>Louis Berkhof *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1937), 83-84.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., 92.

It is easy to observe the manner in which the thought of the early church evolved from the general to the specific. General statements in the early centuries gave way to specific debate over the nature of the Trinity. From discussion concerning the relation of the three Persons of the Trinity, thinkers then began to debate the specifics of one Person of the Trinity in particular, namely, the Son.

Debate over the two natures of Christ came to the forefront in the views of Apollinarius in the late fourth century. While some in this debate tended to overemphasize the human nature of the Son, he stressed the divinity of Christ at the expense of His true humanity. “He stressed the deity of Christ but minimized His true manhood. His view was officially condemned at the ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381.”<sup>135</sup>

On the opposing side was an individual who would eventually become patriarch at Constantinople, the scholarly fifth century monk, Nestorius (ca. 381-452). Referring to the Son as “God-bearer,” rather than truly God in essence, he stressed the human nature of Christ to the neglect of His deity.

While the pendulum continued to swing back and forth between these two views, the issue was settled in the orthodox statement of Chalcedon in 451.

The Council of Chalcedon went on to promulgate a Christology that would be in accord with the Scriptures. The council held that Christ was ‘complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man,’ having ‘two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.’ These two natures were brought together harmoniously in one person with one essence by the Incarnation. This formulation has been the view of the orthodox on this point since the time of the council.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>Cairns, 136.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid.

In the years following Chalcedon the debate raged between the monophysites and the monothelites over the question of whether Christ had only one nature (monophysites), the primary teachers of which were Cyril and Eutichus, and whether Christ had only one will (monothelites). More significant for the purposes of this present work, however, is a Christological development between Chalcedon and Aquinas which can be seen in the adoptionist views of Felix, bishop of Urgella, Spain.

Basing his views on passages of Scripture which refer to the inferiority of Christ as man to the Father, and “on the fact that believers are sons of God by adoption, and are also called ‘brethren’ of Christ,”<sup>137</sup> Felix taught that on His human side Christ was the Son of God by adoption. The views of Felix and his followers were challenged by Alcuin, the “noted scholar of the days of Charlemagne” and condemned by the Synod of Frankfort in 794.<sup>138</sup>

Theologians continued to fine tune their Christological statements throughout the Middle Ages. Aquinas’ views were in line with orthodox statements of the past, as were those of Calvin and Luther. Calvin is very thorough in his discussion of the Trinity. The title itself is enough to see that Calvin is in line with the orthodox creeds of the past, “In Scripture, From the Creation Onward, We are Taught One Essence of God, Which Contains Three Persons.”<sup>139</sup> It is generally agreed that both “Luther and Calvin as biblical theologians affirmed a Christology which was in full accord with Chalcedon;

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<sup>137</sup>Berkhof, *Christian Doctrines*, 112.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

<sup>139</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 120.

indeed, the Chalcedonian Definition became an important element in the creedal literature of most of the Reformation churches.”<sup>140</sup>

The next century, however, would see attacks on the deity of Christ that would continue until the present day. In the name of Reason, the Socinians denied the true divinity of the Son, claiming that Christ was a mere man, “though he possessed a peculiar fullness of the Spirit.”<sup>141</sup> While orthodox Evangelicals held adamantly to the biblical creeds of the past, the Enlightenment thinking of the Socinians would continue through the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Albert Ritschl (1822-1889) has exerted tremendous influence on nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers. His primary emphasis was the Work of Christ as opposed to His Person. “Christ is a mere man, but in view of the work He accomplished and the service He rendered we rightly attribute to Him the predicate of God.”<sup>142</sup>

Asserting that “the twentieth century has not cut itself adrift from the eighteenth,” D. Wells explains how “it is in this period that a decisive break with classical Christology has frequently occurred. The rise of Enlightenment rationalism coincided, as it turned out, with the decline in religious vitality in both Protestantism and Catholicism.”<sup>143</sup> Liberalism of the nineteenth and early twentieth century would give way to the neo-orthodox views of the early and mid-twentieth century. No longer would the church as a whole adhere to the great Christological formulas of the past. To this day, only Evangelicalism clings to orthodox views on the Trinity and the dual nature of the Son. In

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<sup>140</sup>David F. Wells *The Person of Christ: A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1984), 122.

<sup>141</sup>Berkhof, *Christian Doctrine*, 96.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 122.

many theological circles debate over the meaning of Ps. 2:7 would be a moot point due to the fact that so many, especially in institutions of higher learning, do not even believe in the inspiration of Scripture.

L. Berkhof explains that in light of the “modern pantheistic idea of the immanence of God, the doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ is today often represented in a thoroughly naturalistic way.”<sup>144</sup> This is similar to the New Age idea of the divinity of all men. The church as a whole has departed from the great creeds of the past which exhibited such a high Christology.

#### Views on Psalm 2:7 in the History of the Church

The precise meaning of this verse has been the occasion for considerable debate over the centuries. The two obvious questions have been addressed by scholars from the first century on, namely, “When did the ‘Today’ of the verse take place? And “What is the nature of the sonship involved?”

Earliest comment comes from Clement of Alexandria. In I Clement 36:4-5 he demonstrates that Jesus was begotten by God so that he might make Himself known.<sup>145</sup> J. Watts notes that while this language suggests that Clement may have taught subordinationism, elsewhere he does seem to teach that Christ was pre-existent.<sup>146</sup>

The second century apologist, Justin Martyr, associated the verse with the baptism of Jesus in his *Dialogue With Trypho*, as did Hilary in the fourth century in his *De*

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<sup>143</sup>Wells, 129.

<sup>144</sup>Berkhof, *Christian Doctrines*, 123.

<sup>145</sup>Watts, 83.

*Trinitate*.<sup>147</sup> The idea here seems to be that God the Father acknowledges the Sonship of Jesus at His baptism.

It is the Incarnation that is understood to be the time of the event according to fourth century thinkers Theodore of Mopsuestia and the great orator, Chrysostom.<sup>148</sup> In his *Enchiridion*, Augustine explains Ps. 2:7 as a reference to “the day of an unchangeable eternity, in order to show that this man was one in person with the Only-Begotten.”<sup>149</sup> In similar terminology, Aquinas asserts that the begetting is an eternal act, not a temporal one.<sup>150</sup> Both Augustine and Aquinas stress the fact that there was never a point when the Son “became” the Son, but was rather eternally the Son of God, and of the same essence as the Father. Both avoided the errors of adoptionism and preserved the orthodox understanding that the church affirmed at Nicea and Chalcedon.

Calvin took more seriously that fact that the Psalm was originally addressed to David, but refers ultimately to Christ. “Then the things found in this Psalm must have been shadowed forth in David, but were fully accomplished in Christ.”<sup>151</sup> J. Watts explains Calvin’s method when he says that “he interpreted the psalms as spoken by David, but as David’s kingdom foreshadows Christ’s, so what David says of himself

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

<sup>147</sup>Hughes, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 54.

<sup>148</sup>Ellingworth, 113.

<sup>149</sup>Hughes, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 54. Also, Watts, 83. He notes that Augustine thought it could also be a prophesy of Jesus’ birth.

<sup>150</sup>Watts, 83.

<sup>151</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 40.

applies also to Christ.”<sup>152</sup> In a sense Calvin paved the way for an exegetical method that would take seriously the original life setting of a passage before making application or drawing out typology.

In more recent times the verse has been understood to refer to the resurrection of Christ (Delitzsch),<sup>153</sup> or more generally, to His exaltation, which would include the Resurrection and Ascension (Westcott).<sup>154</sup> F.F. Bruce cites Romans 1:4 and Christ’s acclamation as High Priest in Ps. 110:4 in support of the idea that it is the exaltation and enthronement that is in mind.<sup>155</sup>

Finally, many modern scholars have simply ignored the verse or, with Gunkel, have found little of value for the Christian community. As noted in the previous section on the history of Christology in general, modern thinkers have abandoned both a high view of Scripture and a high view of Christ Himself.

In assessing the ideas on Christology and the understanding of Ps. 2:7 throughout the history of the church, certain observations can be made. There are errors that the church must avoid. The Son is not inferior to the Father as the subordinationist views of Origen suggest. In His essence He is fully God and the church must affirm this high view of Christ. The church must not forget the formula of Chalcedon, where the biblical view of the Son was set forth. The church must remember great men like Athanasius who stood firm for the truth in midst of heresy.

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<sup>152</sup>Watts, 83.

<sup>153</sup>Ellingworth, 113. He notes that Delitzsch refers to Acts 13:33 as support for this view as has the present writer in the analysis of the text.

<sup>154</sup>Westcott, 21.

<sup>155</sup>Bruce, 54.

On the other hand, the church must avoid errors that minimize the humanity of the Son. Apollonarius, like many of the Gnostics, stressed the deity of Christ at the expense of His humanity. The church must not fail to unveil the danger of this heresy. There is no atonement if the Son did not take on the very nature of humanity.

Concerning the views about Ps. 2:7, the view of Justin Martyr and Hilary that the verse refers to the baptism of Christ has little Scriptural support. The Father's words "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11) reflect the nature of the relationship between the Father and Son, but they do not fulfill the words of Ps. 2:7. While the Incarnation would be a logical fulfillment of the passage, there is simply no Scriptural reference that indicates that this is the case. The view of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Chrysostom that the passage refers to the Son's taking on of humanity has no solid basis in Scripture. Paul clearly links Ps. 2:7 with the resurrection in Acts 13:33. This view, held by B. F. Westcott, F. Delitzsch and F. F. Bruce, accords well with the original life setting of the Psalm. Ps. 2 speaks of the rise of God's anointed in response to the raging of the enemy. God exalts His King to the throne which brings defeat to the foes of God Almighty.

Finally, the view of Augustine and Aquinas that the begetting is eternal, not temporal, is grounded in Scripture. As discussed above in the theology section, the first four verses of Hebrews support this truth. These men understood the idea that there never was a time when the Son was not the Son. He has always existed and He has always been God.

### **Christological Implications and Practical Application for the Church and Individual**

The two uses of Ps. 2:7 in Hebrews stress the Kingly and Priestly offices of Christ. The Old Testament Davidic king was a foreshadowing of Christ who is the final King of his people. Likewise, Jesus is the merciful High Priest, who makes propitiation and intercession on behalf of His people. It is of interest to note that these two roles stress aspects of the two natures of Christ, the human and the divine. As King He rules over His realm as the Sovereign God. As Priest, He is close and intimate with us in that He has suffered all that we endure.

As mentioned above, one significant conclusion of this work is the fact that while the royal psalms cannot be detached from their historical moorings, the central focus of these poems is not a Davidic king. It is rather of Jesus Christ Himself, the King of Kings. Therefore, our reading of them should draw us to a contemplation of Christ. Our study of these psalms should lead us to see Christ. We see His sovereignty, His omnipotence and His oneness with the Father. This should radically change how we approach them. Questions to be contemplated while reading the psalms are: what does this psalm teach about Jesus? what specific attributes are revealed? how is my understanding of God changed as a result? and finally, how is my life changed with my deeper knowledge of the Son of God?

Along with the above conclusions, there are certain implications concerning the Person and Work of Christ. Christ is superior, not only because of *who* He is, but also because of *what* He has done. None other has ever been raised from the dead. The implication from the context in chapter one of Hebrews and Acts 13:33 is that Jesus' Person is tied to His Work. The two are inseparable. "In the teaching of the New

Testament the person and the work of Christ belong together as a unity. A right understanding of the person of Christ is essential to a right understanding of his work.”<sup>156</sup>

The church must worship Christ with knowledge of both His Person and His Work. It is often true that one or both are neglected. The writer of Hebrews knew that it was necessary to stress both to his audience. We worship a Savior who is superior in every way because of both who He is and what He has done.

Spurgeon says that “It is, or should be, the desire of every Christian to see and enjoy more and more of the glory of God.”<sup>157</sup> An investigation of the lofty doctrine of Ps. 2 and the Christology of the book of Hebrews brings a clearer and sharper image of who God is. We see Jesus as the King who rules over His creation. In this examination we experience the glory of God. There is no greater contemplation of God, than Christ. There is no topic so challenging, inspiring, and life-changing as Jesus Christ.

Yet another benefit of delving into Christology, and specifically the implications of the text at hand in this work, is a broader understanding of theology in general. Jesus Christ is the starting point for good theology. M. J. Erickson says it well.

When we come to the study of the person and work of Christ, we are at the very center of Christian theology. For since Christians are by definition believers in and followers of Christ, their understanding of Christ must be central and determinative of the very character of the Christian faith. All else is secondary to the question of what one thinks of Christ. This being the case, particular care and precision are especially in order in the doing of our Christology.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup>Hughes, *Christology of Hebrews*, 19.

<sup>157</sup>Spurgeon, vol. 3, 14.

<sup>158</sup>Erickson, 661-662.

M. J. Erickson is communicating that the conclusions reached concerning Christ will be determinative of conclusions in other areas. If one draws from Ps. 2 an adoptionistic Christology, his/her soteriology will inevitably be heretical. If Jesus is not the Son of God, equal and of the same essence as God the Father, then His sacrifice will not suffice to save from sin. In the area of ecclesiology, how can Jesus be the builder of the church if He is not who He said He was?

Along the same lines, an informed Christology allows the church to avoid perennial errors in doctrine. The Jehovah's Witness faith, for example, a modern-day version of Arianism, propagates the idea that Jesus was created by God. Grasping this text aids the church in dealing with the views of such cults.

It is true, after all, that *what* one believes determines *how* one behaves. Doctrine determines behavior. A person's life is greatly changed by his beliefs.

This work closes with two further benefits concerning the knowledge of Christ gained from Ps. 2 in Hebrews. First, the believer rests with confidence in the Divine King. As Spurgeon exclaims in the midst of his exposition of Ps. 2, "What a mercy to have a Divine Redeemer in whom to rest our confidence!"<sup>159</sup> Not only does the believer rest with confidence in the Divine Ruler, but, secondly, he is drawn to love a God whom he knows more intimately. Only then is the believer able to obey the highest command ever given, to "love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength."<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup>Spurgeon, vol. 1, 13.

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<sup>160</sup>Deuteronomy 6:4. ("Your" changed to "Our")

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